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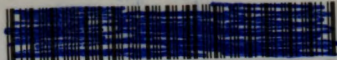
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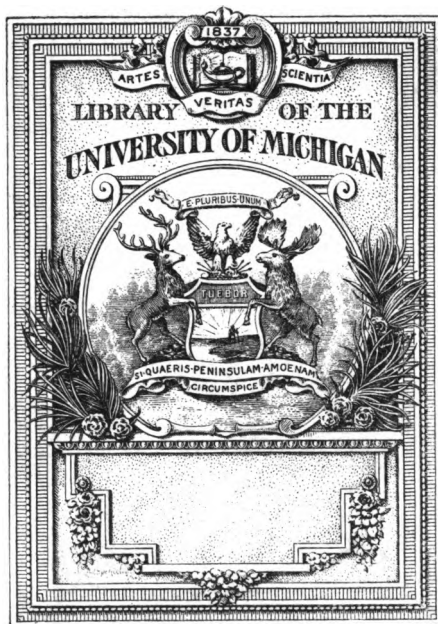
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A few words in defence
of an Elderly Lady.
By Robert C. Winthrop, Jr.



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A FEW WORDS
IN DEFENCE OF
AN ELDERLY LADY.

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DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

CONCERNING THE REASONS WHY

KATHARINE WINTHROP

REFUSED TO MARRY

CHIEF JUSTICE SEWALL.

Winthrop, Robert Charles

— ♦ —

BOSTON:

PRIVATELY PRINTED.

1885.

PREFATORY NOTE.

BY-LAWS OF THE

SOCIETY.

CHAPTER XIII. ARTICLE 2.

“All papers read or remarks made by any member, which such member shall desire or be willing to have printed, shall be submitted to the Publishing Committee for the purpose, and shall be subject to their discretion: provided, however, that any member may publish, on his own responsibility, any paper or remarks of his own which the Committee may not think fit to include in their report; it being understood that, in such case, the *name* of the Society is not to be used in any way whatever in connection with such publication.”

CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN THE CHAMPION OF AN ELDERLY LADY RECITES
HER WRONGS.

*"And darest thou then
To beard the lion in his den,
The Douglas in his hall?"*

AT a stated meeting of the Society in its hall adjoining King's Chapel Graveyard, Boston, on Thursday, Feb. 12, 1885, the Senior Vice-President (Rev. GEORGE E. ELLIS, D.D., LL.D.) in the chair, after a variety of business had been transacted, communications from the Third Section were called for, when Mr. R. C. WINTHROP, Jr., rose and said:—

MR. CHAIRMAN,— The pamphlet which I hold in my hand is entitled "An Address on the Life and Character of Chief Justice SAMUEL SEWALL, delivered in the Old South Church, Boston, Sunday, Oct. 26, 1884, by GEORGE E. ELLIS. . . . Printed for the author, 1885." On the cover, in not unfamiliar penmanship, is inscribed "Hon. Robert C. Winthrop, with respects of George E. Ellis." In other words, Sir, this is the pamphlet which, at the close of our last monthly meeting, you handed to me to give to my father; and the reason why I preferred to await a more advanced stage of his convalescence before doing so, is that I accidentally observed that, on the eighteenth page, you style his great-great-grandmother a "worldly-minded woman," and you intimate that she first encouraged an old man to make her an offer of marriage and then refused him from mercenary motives.

I hope nobody imagines, from this exordium, that I have come here this afternoon with an idea of making myself disagreeable to our revered Vice-President. I should be the last person to suppose, Sir, that in penning or uttering or printing those perhaps hasty lines, you had any deliberate intention of giving umbrage to a human being. The Address in question is a most interesting — I might say an inimitable — one, replete with that delicate and subtle humor which lends so frequent a charm to the productions of its author's prolific pen, and it is thus possible that you may have intended your allusions to this lady to be considered in some degree jocose ; or, indeed, by some recondite process of imagination, you may have persuaded yourself that she would not have felt otherwise than complimented at the thought that, one hundred and sixty years after her death, in the meeting-house of that Religious Society of which she was so long a member, her memory should be evoked even in so questionable a form. But, Sir, speaking for her, as I shall presently show I have a peculiar right to do, — speaking for her, I feel certain she would not have regarded this matter either as a joke or as a compliment, and that in point of fact her feelings towards you on this subject would be best expressed in the words of that familiar couplet, —

“Perhaps it was right to dissemble your love,
But — why did you kick me downstairs ?”

It may occur to somebody that I am, perhaps, a little sensitive. There are, I dare say, persons so constituted, — there may, for ought I know, be more than one member of this Society so constituted, — that if, in the Old South Church or elsewhere, he was to hear his great-great-grandmother publicly stigmatized as a worldly-minded woman, he might content himself with ejaculating “I dare say she was,” or “I don’t care whether she was, or not,” or something to that effect. Or, again, had I straightway carried this pamphlet to the person for whom it is destined, and had his eye, instead of mine, rested upon this passage, it is not unlikely that with that good-

ness of heart so characteristic of him, he would have contented himself with remarking, "This is certainly an extraordinary statement; but, after all, let it go." I confess that I cannot quite make up my mind to let it go. Sufferance is not the badge of *all* my tribe. The angelic attribute of Patience has ever been imperfectly developed in my composition. But while I purpose taking up a little of this Society's time this afternoon, in vindication of a most estimable elderly lady, upon whose grave I could drop a biscuit from yonder window, I shall not for a moment forget the respect I owe to a most estimable elderly gentleman, sitting here in the flesh before us, and so deservedly entitled to the consideration of us all.

The facts in question depend mainly upon this Society's edition of Judge Sewall's Diary.

That eminent man, when nearly sixty-seven, had the misfortune to lose a wife to whom he had been married four-and-forty years. Three months after her funeral, he records that his mind was "wandering whether to lead a Single or a Married Life;" but when, a few days later, the subject of second marriages came up in conversation, he remarked, "They that had been at Sea should be careful how they put to Sea again, especially in winter-time, meaning Old Age." Notwithstanding this sagacious observation, it is clear, from passages in the Diary which it would take too long to mention, that at this period the Judge's thoughts ran much on widows; and the Editors append this footnote, presumably written by Dr. Ellis himself:—

"It seems to have been assumed by Sewall's friends that his decision would be for a renewal of married life, and some of them appeared to have interested themselves in selecting a partner for him, while he himself was not inactive in the matter."

At the outset he seems to have been a little in doubt in which direction to throw the handkerchief; but somewhat later, on the 3d of June, 1718, he started for Roxbury, with the intention of offering himself to a wealthy widow whose husband when on his death-bed, little more than two months

before, had sent for Sewall to draw his will. A friend whom he met on the way persuaded him to postpone this injudiciously hasty declaration; and it was not until the end of the following November that the Chief Justice, finding that, in spite of a vigorous and protracted courtship, the lady persisted in declining to change her name for Sewall, wrote in his Diary:—

“My bowels yearn towards M^r Dennison, but I think God directs me in his Providence to desist.”

Disappointed, but not disheartened, by this misadventure, he lay upon his oars, so to speak, during the winter; but the ensuing summer found his affections fastened upon another widow, a native of New Jersey, less advantageously dowered than her predecessor, but who, having been already blessed with two husbands, was apparently not indisposed to try a third. Sewall evidently did not think it necessary to ply her with the numerous gifts which had been of so little service to him in his suit to Mrs. Dennison; and he seems to have contented himself with presenting to Mrs. Tilly a little book, previously given by him to his first wife, and entitled by its author, Dr. Cotton Mather, “Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion.” These ornaments, however, proved sufficiently enticing. The widow married the Chief Justice a few weeks later; but her health was poor, and after not quite seven months of wedlock, he found himself a second time a widower, in the spring of 1720.

The venerable magistrate, then in his sixty-ninth year, was equal to the occasion. With graceful but somewhat circumlocutory euphuism, Dr. Ellis describes him as one for whom “romance was now out of the question,”—as one who, “unwilling to bring in and set at his table a hireling, a housekeeper,” preferred to pay “his tribute, and a noble one it was, to that wise, judicious, though exacting rule for the order and security of New England domestic life,—that every home should have in it a presiding mistress, competent, congenial with its head,—a wife.” In shorter and homelier English, he wanted to marry another woman, and immediately

set about it, offering himself successively to three widow-ladies within the space of little more than a year and a half.

The one of these three ladies to whom he accorded the priority of his attachment — the one who, I need hardly say, possessed the longest purse — was Katharine Winthrop, — “Madam Winthrop,” as Sewall and other friends called her, to distinguish her from the wife of her step-son; “*Madame Winthrop*,” as Dr. Ellis’s printer has unaccountably seen fit to Frenchify her. A daughter of Captain Thomas Brattle, she had married for her first husband John Eyre, a well-known merchant of Boston, and for her second, Wait Winthrop, a man who passed a long life in the military or civil service of the New England Colonies, and who had been one of Sewall’s predecessors in the office of Chief Justice. The latter had always been a frequent visitor at Wait Winthrop’s house; they sat for years side by side on the bench of the Superior Court, and for a still longer period at the Executive Council Board; while two of their sons had married sisters. There was thus great intimacy between the families until, in an evil hour, Sewall got it into his head that he could persuade his old friend’s widow, some thirteen years his junior, to become his third wife. With the exception of another misadventure of his, not of a matrimonial nature, and only darkly alluded to in the published Diary, there is nothing in the whole three volumes which has excited so much amusement as this unsuccessful courtship of Madam Winthrop, the details of which, extending over fourteen pages, are given with a minuteness and a raciness which the writer does not exhibit in earlier or later experiences of a similar description. I do not intend to quote at length from what most members of the Society have probably already laughed over, and I shall content myself with reading Dr. Ellis’s short account of the matter, and in pointing out wherein I think that account differs from the original and does injustice to the lady. Dr. Ellis says: —

“We note the warming-up and the cooling-off process. She seems to have first suggested the arrangement to him. But he was ready.

...

And when she was making up her mind adversely, Sewall was quick to see the signs. Her linen was not as clean as usual when she had received him; she kept on her gloves; she drew a small table between them, etc. Now Madame Winthrop was evidently a 'worldly-minded' woman. Clearly Sewall might have won her, had he been willing to gratify her in two exacted conditions. These were, first, by setting up an equipage at a greater expense than he, though fully able, thought it wise to indulge; second, that, like the great dignitaries of his time, he should wear a full wig. . . . So his suit fell through. He turned his attention elsewhere, and easily succeeded."

"He turned his attention elsewhere, and easily succeeded"! I repeat and emphasize that last sentence because it seems so strangely at variance with the distinct statement of the Chief Justice that, six months after he had finally relinquished his pursuit of Madam Winthrop, he "turned his attention" to a widow-lady by the name of Ruggles, who incontinently refused him also! His "easy" success, if easy we are to call it, was not till early in the following year, when he offered himself to still another widow-lady, by the name of Gibbs, who eventually decided to accept him, after considerable hesitation and much negotiation about settlements.

Quite as difficult do I find it to reconcile Dr. Ellis's characterization of Sewall at this period as a man for whom "romance was out of the question," and who, in seeking a third wife, only desired to pay a tribute, "a noble tribute," to New England usages, — quite as difficult, I say, do I find it to reconcile this language with the Chief Justice's detailed account of how he repeatedly tried to kiss Madam Winthrop, of how he told her that to him "her kisses were better than the best Canary," and that his visits to her were "deep draughts of pleasure." When a Chief Justice of Massachusetts so far forgets himself as to convert a quiet evening call into an amorous demonstration of so apparently aggressive a nature that his hostess thinks it prudent to place a piece of furniture between them, it seems to me unwise to associate such a performance with the idea of a noble tribute to Puritan customs, and that perhaps the most charitable thing we can say is that, for such a man, romance was not yet wholly extinct.

These, however, are subordinate issues. The sting and the injustice, as I think, however unintentional, of Dr. Ellis's narrative lie in three earlier sentences, namely: "She seems to have first suggested the arrangement to him. . . . She was evidently a worldly-minded woman. . . . Clearly Sewall might have won her had he been willing to gratify her . . . by setting up an equipage," and by wearing "a full wig." Now, what are the facts? What says the Diary? Under ordinary circumstances the motives ascribed to a woman by a rejected lover may fairly be regarded with some suspicion; but in this instance I am perfectly willing to take the Chief Justice's account of the matter for what it is worth,—perhaps for more than it is worth. It was on the afternoon of the 1st of October, 1720, that Sewall paid his first visit to Madam Winthrop's house in the guise of a suitor. He had been there scores of times before as a friend, and may latterly have cast a sheep's eye or two; but this was the formal opening of the campaign, and he was careful to send word he was coming. He began, as I suppose ninety-nine men out of a hundred in his position would have begun, by referring to the recent death of his loving wife; but he added, with some astuteness, that he had resolved "not to Court" anybody else without first consulting the lady he was addressing. Then followed some pleasantry about seven marriageable gentlewomen, who had occupied the "Fore-seat," or place of honor, at the South Church the previous Sunday, Madam Winthrop suggesting to him first one and then another. The next day he called again, and, with his customary promptitude, popped the question; whereupon, to use his own words,—

"She instantly took it up in the way of Denyal, as if she had caught at an opportunity to do it, saying she could not do it before she was asked. I expressed my sorrow she should do it so speedily, prayed her consideration, and asked when I should wait on her agen. She setting no time, I mentioned that day Sennight."

Nothing can be clearer than that, so far from suggesting that my relative made advances to him, Sewall actually com-

plains that she snapped him up with a refusal when the words were barely out of his mouth!

He did not, however, wait till that day sennight, but returned to the charge four days after, arming himself with some gingerbread which a friend had given him, and which he presented to the object of his affections, besides privately distributing four and sixpence among her servants. On this occasion he enlarged much upon his lonesomeness, dwelling upon the help they might be to each other in their journey to Canaan; but the lady continued obdurate. A few days later he came again, ostensibly for the purpose of bringing a newspaper, on which occasion, he says, he was treated with great courtesy, including wine and marmalade, — attentions which he seems to have eagerly regarded as compromising as Mr. Pickwick's landlady did his famous order for "chops and tomato-sauce." The following day he sent her a sermon, and the next, October 12, he came bringing a book which cost him six shillings; but, notwithstanding this exceptional liberality, he describes her manner as "cold and indifferent," and her countenance as "dark and lowering." In spite of this, and on the principle that faint heart never won fair lady, he attempted to kiss her, and implored her to change her mind. She answered that she had already told him she did not wish to leave her home and her children, or to change her mode of life; whereupon he rejoined, in one of his most characteristic speeches, "I told her she might do some good to help and support *me*." It was to no purpose. He stayed away five days, and then renewed the siege, making, in all, seven more visits, plying her with newspapers, tracts, oranges, and almonds, besides privately giving five shillings to her maid. He even offered to settle £100 a year on her, in the event of her surviving him; but the effect of this dazzling proposal was obviously impaired by his inquiring, in the same breath, how much she would be willing to settle upon him, and by his stipulating, as she understood it, that she should not keep so many servants. She would hardly have been a woman — certainly not a woman of five-and-fifty —

if she had not been somewhat flattered by his extreme persistency. She did not refuse to receive him ; she told him that, though she did not love him, she had a very great respect for him ; she remembered his ancient intimacy with her husband, the near connection between their families, and she tried, as so many women do, to let him down easy and retain his friendship. His nearest approach, if approach it can be called, to making a positive impression upon her would seem to have been on the occasion of his tenth and last proposal, November 7, when he began by inquiring whether she was still of the same mind, and she, as he says, replied, "Thereabouts." This word "thereabouts" may be interpreted as implying a doubt ; if so, that doubt was of short duration, as, later in the same evening, she intentionally let the parlor fire go out and did not offer to send a servant, with a lantern, to light him home. This was more than the poor old man could stand. He does not appear to have set foot in her house again for nearly five years, and he revenged himself by writing down that she was not so cleanly dressed as usual. The grapes were distinctly sour.

Strange as it may seem, those "two exacted conditions," the equipage and the wig, which figure so prominently in Dr. Ellis's narrative, are not once alluded to in the Diary until she had formally refused him four or five times. Indeed, she is not recorded to have mentioned the wig but once, on the 20th of October, in the morning of which day Colonel Townsend, one of Sewall's colleagues at the Council-chamber, had advised him to get a wig, and in the afternoon he says, Madam Winthrop "spake something of my needing a wig." The equipage, or coach, she is only recorded to have mentioned twice,—first, on the 19th of October, when she earnestly advised him to keep one ; and second, on the following day, when she said that Madam Usher, who had just been to see her, was of the same opinion. Both ladies evidently remembered Sewall's fondness for riding in his friends' vehicles, and how, as the Diary shows, he was continually getting a lift in the late Wait Winthrop's coach ; and they not unnaturally thought it high time he had

one of his own. Such suggestions had probably been made to him by others, and the way in which he harps upon the subject shows it was a sore one. So far as Madam Winthrop was concerned her advice was intended to be general in its application, and was dictated by a sense of what was only fitting for a man of Sewall's official station and private fortune. The idea which she wished to convey to him was that, at his time of life, with his figure and physiognomy, he ought not to expect to persuade a desirable woman to marry him by giving her occasionally a tract, an orange, a bit of chocolate, a pound of almonds, or a lump of gingerbread; but that he must exhibit more willingness to spend money, pay some attention to his personal appearance, wear a wig like other magistrates, and keep a carriage and pair like other gentlemen of his means. The advice was sound, but unpalatable. On pleasure he was bent, but he had a frugal mind. A coach and horses would involve a considerable outlay, and he preferred to take his chance of other people's coaches, or to borrow his son's calash. A full-bottomed wig was an expensive matter in those days; and he preferred to proclaim his contentment with the hair his Maker had given him, or what was left of it. He clung to the idea that the tracts and the oranges and the chocolate and the almonds might still do the business.

I am aware, Mr. Chairman, that, in another portion of this Address, you have painted your hero as a man of considerable liberality; but I cannot help thinking you may have been insensibly led to this conclusion by attaching too much importance to his indulgence in sweetmeats, and by the recollection of that exceptional entertainment, of which you give so graphic an account, when, after the birth of Sewall's fourteenth child, twenty years before, he provided a very bountiful repast for his wife's monthly nurse, and invited to grace the occasion no less than fifteen of her professional sisters. There can be no doubt that the society of these matrons, and the reminiscences, in which they doubtless indulged, of a calling at once so necessary and so intimate,—there can be no doubt, I say, that the after-dinner conversation of these six-

teen females was eminently congenial to the mind of Samuel Sewall. But it will require something more than a banquet of this unique description once in a lifetime, something more than an occasional readiness to share the toothsome delicacies he habitually carried in his pocket, to convince the attentive and impartial student of the provincial period that he was not what is known in the interior of New England by that expressive phrase "a little near." Aside from a certain willingness to dispense sermons and dainties among the ladies of his acquaintance, the Chief Justice in his old age had grown perceptibly close-fisted; and this is the real reason why, in spite of his social position, his public station, his personal popularity, and his many admirable qualities, he always found it so difficult to marry to his liking.

And now I do not wish it to be supposed that my interest in this lady depends wholly upon this Diary, or upon the fact that I bear her name and am descended from her husband. It has fallen to my lot, of recent years, to examine and arrange that portion of the Winthrop Papers which successive Committees of this Society have set aside as being probably of second or third rate importance. In other words, where more experienced hands than mine have gathered the wheat, I occupy myself in winnowing the chaff, now and then gleaning some little discoveries, of interest to myself if to no one else. Among those little discoveries has been the comparatively recent identification of no less than nineteen letters of this very Madam Winthrop, written between 1711 and 1722, and addressed either to her husband or to his son John and his wife, during their absence in New London. They are essentially domestic letters, of no general interest; but they bespeak, if letters ever did, a pious, loving, warm-hearted, unselfish New England wife and mother. Sewall, as the familiar friend of the family, is repeatedly alluded to in them, and always by the title of "Captain;" the rank of Commander of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company being apparently then considered of more importance than a seat on the bench of the highest court in the Province. I do

not intend to take up time by reading these letters; but I have brought one with me, partly as a voucher and partly as a curiosity. It is dated July 30, 1711, and is, so to speak, tripartite; consisting, on one side of the page, of a letter of some length from the then John Winthrop to his father, and, on the other side, of a little note from Katharine Winthrop to her husband, addressing him as "My Dear Soul," and telling him "we are frightened with news of a French fleet." Just above this little note is still another, from Sewall himself, who had evidently happened in before the packet was sealed, and who availed himself of this opportunity to inquire whether his friend had received a previous letter, adding, —

"I should be glad also to know upon what grounds you affirm the Caspian Sea to be salt, which, if I remember right, you doe.

*'Prudentis mori latitas sub tegmine tutus,
Eligis et audis liber amoena vides.'*

"I am, Sir, your most humble Serv^t,

"SAMUEL SEWALL."

The writer would appear to have been more at home in the Latin authors than in geography, but I should be much obliged if any gentleman would point me to the source of that quotation, which I have thus far searched for unsuccessfully.¹

Lastly, in addition to these homespun letters, brimful of tender thought for others and free from any taint of worldly-mindedness, I have yet another bit of evidence in this lady's marriage settlements, — I mean the settlements executed on her second marriage, her marriage to Wait Winthrop. And what did this so-called mercenary woman ask of the presumably enamored man who was about to lead her to the altar, and who, I may add, was very much richer than herself? Did she ask him to keep a coach? He already kept one. Did

¹ An accomplished member of the Society, who has devoted much attention to Latin poetry (Mr. Henry W. Haynes), informs me that the passage in question would probably be found among the letters addressed by some of his friends to Erasmus, while the latter was residing under the roof of Sir Thomas More.

she ask him to wear a wig? He already wore a most portentous one. Did she ask him, as might well be supposed from the language applied to her, — did she ask him to make a new will in her favor, or to settle exorbitant sums upon her, to the exclusion or injury of his children? Nothing of the kind. She simply asked, — and the papers are on record to prove it, and are passingly alluded to by Sewall himself in this very Diary, — she simply asked that her own property, whether derived from her father or her first husband, should be secured to her, and then, in consideration of a moderate sum — moderate in proportion to the dower she might have claimed — to be paid to her in the event of her becoming again a widow, she absolutely released that dower in order that her husband's children by his first marriage might not suffer prejudice by the new arrangement. Such conduct speaks volumes for her character, and should, in my judgment, outweigh one hundredfold any contrary impressions of it which may be wrung from the peevish chatter of a discarded septuagenarian suitor!

As I turned over her letters the other day, to refresh my memory of their contents, I seemed to see that old lady stand before me. I seemed to hear her say: "I don't care what Sam Sewall said. He was my husband's and my own old friend. I could n't make up my mind to marry him, and I poked a little fun at him, and he went home cross, and wrote down that I had dirty cuffs, and so on. But he never meant that a syllable of what he wrote should be made public, he would have been inexpressibly outraged at the idea of printing it, and I forgive him. Yet to think — to think that in the meeting-house of that religious society with which I so long worshipped, before which my children were baptized and my funeral sermon was preached, and by which, for so many years, I was held in reverence and honor, — to think that in that meeting-house, one hundred and sixty years after my death, the silly things Sam Sewall wrote about me are to be not merely repeated to the congregation, but made a great deal worse! Is there no one," I seemed to hear her add, —

"is there no one of my name or of my blood who is ready to stand up and vindicate me from such unjust aspersions?" And I said to myself, or rather I seemed to myself to say to her, "Venerated grandparent,—several times removed,—what is done cannot be undone; but so far as any efforts of mine can tend to mitigate your very natural resentment, they shall not be wanting. I cannot hope to be allowed to occupy the pulpit of the Old South Church. I am not much addicted to printing pamphlets. But, as a member of the Third Section of the Society, I am entitled, at stated intervals, to uplift my voice in their hall; and I will go there, at the very next opportunity, and say what I can in your behalf, even if it should involve breaking a lance successively with all the Doctors of Divinity whose names add lustre to the roll of that ancient body!" And that is the why and the wherefore of my remarks this afternoon. I am sensible that I have detained the Society too long. I am sensible that while for the moment a certain zest may be added to our meetings if we are to proceed, month by month, to discuss the love-affairs of our great-grandmothers, yet that in the end such discussions will add little to our public usefulness or to our private harmony; but, as I began by intimating, this issue was not of my seeking.

I will only add, Mr. Chairman, that it is now but little more than six weeks since you and I sat together, side by side, in adjoining pews, in the Old South Church, in attendance upon the obsequies of the much-lamented Dr. Blagden; and as we were waiting there for all that was mortal of that most amiable and excellent old man to be borne reverently up the aisle, you suddenly leaned forward, across the partition which divided us, and in a solemn and impressive whisper you exclaimed to me, "What *would* Sam Sewall say, to see this church!" The approach of the melancholy procession cut short my answer; if, indeed, I should have been able, on the spur of the moment, to frame an adequate response to so pregnant an inquiry. But, sir, with your permission, I will answer that question briefly now. Whatever feelings of

amazement might agitate the breast of Samuel Sewall at the aspect of that gorgeous temple which has replaced the unpretending edifice in which he loved to worship, — whatever of not altogether complimentary criticism he might feel it his duty to pronounce upon the successive changes time has wrought in the environment of all that is left of Puritan faith, — it would be as nothing — as nothing — in comparison with the indignation which would convulse his very soul if he could come into this room to-day and run his eye over certain passages in his private journal which this Society has printed for the amusement of the New England people. I verily believe that for the first time he would even regret his persistent refusal to wear a wig, in order that he might be able to tear it from his head and hurl it in the faces of our Publishing Committee!

CHAPTER II.

WHEREIN AN ELDERLY LADY'S CHAMPION UNFOLDS
A PENITENTIAL TALE.

"All they that see me . . . they shoot out the lip, they shake the head."

AT a stated meeting of the same Society, on Thursday, April 9, 1885, when communications from the Second Section had been called for, Mr. R. C. WINTHROP, Jr., rose and said : —

MR. PRESIDENT, — I need hardly say that I am not a member of the section on which you have just called ; and the reason why I rise with this apparent precipitation is because I conceive that a personal explanation is entitled to precedence, — more particularly when a member has been most unexpectedly prevented from making such an explanation at a previous meeting, and prevented, so to speak, by witchcraft.

What I mean by that is, that I came here at the last meeting, intending to make a short personal explanation, — that, with my customary modesty, I waited until the ordinary business had been transacted and until communications had been exhausted from the section first in order, expecting that, in accordance with long-established custom, the others would in turn be called on. Instead of which, you, Sir, in the exercise of that plenary authority which I should be the last person to gainsay, summarily assigned the floor to a learned gentleman from New York, who is not a member of

any section, but who is one of the most erudite and indefatigable of our Corresponding Members, and who comes on here, from time to time, in the interest of certain Salem witches, to arraign that famous Court of Oyer and Terminer of 1692, the legality of which has long been one of our most absorbing and protracted subjects of discussion.

The explanation I am about to make is, as I said before, a short one ; but in order to make it, I am obliged to go back to a period when some of the younger members of this Society were in their cradles, to a time—two and thirty years ago—when, as a member of the Junior Class of Harvard College, and in compliance with an official summons, I waited upon the President of the University, the lamented Dr. James Walker, to hear from his venerable lips the announcement that the College Faculty, by a unanimous vote, had awarded to me what was then known as a “Public Admonition” for an offence which, after this lapse of time, I blush to describe, and which consisted in the consumption and distribution of peanuts in the College Chapel during a Dudleian Lecture. I could not in conscience deny the charge ; and I was aware that any attempt to do so would be futile, as I had not long before been credibly assured that no less competent an authority than a well-known Professor of Political Economy had personally identified a heap of shells under my seat. I ventured, however, to insinuate some slight palliation of the enormity of which I had been guilty, by pointing out that no inconsiderable portion of that Dudleian Lecture had been devoted to undermining certain religious tenets which I had from childhood been taught to reverence. Dr. Walker rejoined, in accents of unmistakable severity, although, as it seemed to me, there played across his expressive features the shadow—the momentary shadow—of a smile: “Mr. Winthrop, your conduct in this, as in some other matters, has been marked by an incorrigible want of decorum.”

Well-nigh a third of a century has passed away since I was privileged to enjoy, on that and at least one other some-

what similar occasion, a few minutes of close personal intercourse with so remarkable a man; and, viewed in the light of subsequent experiences, those memorable words of his which I have just quoted seem now to me to have been instinct with a sort of prophetic pathos. Again and again have I been made the subject of such misconceptions. Endowed by nature with the keenest appreciation of whatever is grave and solemn and respectable in this world; animated as I have long been, by an eager desire to concentrate, these qualities in an eminent degree in my own person, — I yet seem, somehow or other, only to have succeeded in encountering, from time to time, a perverse disposition to attribute to me an ill-judged levity wholly foreign to my temperament. It has even been broadly hinted to me that in a communication which I felt it my duty to make to this Society at its February meeting, I was considered in some influential quarters to have transcended the very climax of previous indiscretion. And so I stand up here this afternoon, figuratively attired in sackcloth, bowing a gray head in what is intended to be a penitential attitude, indicative of contrition; and as I look around me, while I seem to discern here and there on some expressive features the shadow — the momentary shadow — of a smile, yet in my heart of hearts I realize that if some venerable lips saw fit to speak, they would only, I fear, re-echo the language of James Walker two and thirty years ago, and impute to me “an incorrigible absence of decorum.”

To those gentlemen who may not have been present at the February meeting I will briefly explain, that I hurried here that afternoon, bursting, I may say, with what I thought a righteous indignation, — fired, as it were, by a pious zeal to vindicate the memory of an aged lady, who would, had she been able, have risen here herself before us, from her grave just below that window, the great-great-grandmother of the retiring President of this Society, whose character had been, as I conceived, somewhat cruelly bespattered in a recent pamphlet from the authoritative pen of our revered Senior Vice-President, soon,

THE END

as I magnanimously hope, to be hailed by us by an even more august title.¹

After the meeting was over, it occurred to me to put to one of our leading members, with whom I was in casual conversation, this crucial question: "How much," I inquired, "of what I said this afternoon would you advise me to send in for publication?" His countenance fell,—he looked at me somewhat askance,—and, taking refuge in periphrastic ambiguity, he replied: "They are likely to be very short of space in the forthcoming volume. Several memoirs have unexpectedly come in, and the Doctor is said to have prepared one more than forty pages long." Well, I confess, such is the egregious vanity often resulting from literary composition, that for an instant I felt like exclaiming, "How hard—how hard—that this little ewe lamb of mine—this widow's mite of a communication, so to speak—must be sacrificed because some one has unexpectedly prepared a memoir more than forty pages long!" But in a twinkling my better nature asserted its supremacy, and I said to myself, "Age before merit,—I will go home and shear that little ewe lamb!" And I went home, and I clipped away a little here and I expurgated a little there, making a not inconsiderable reduction; and the next day, with a light heart and an easy conscience, I despatched what was left to our admirable Recording Secretary, Professor Young. Bitter, bitter deception! About a week after, I got a letter from him, couched in most courteous language,—he could pen no other,—delicately but frankly intimating to me that my little ewe lamb was a source of no small embarrassment to the Publishing Committee. One eminent member of the Society (whom he did not name) was substantially of the opinion that so misbegotten a beast had no proper place in our sheep-fold. Another eminent member (whom he equally did not name) considered that, if admitted at all, the process of shear-

¹ I cannot always agree with Dr. Ellis; but I rejoice that his eminent services to historical literature have received fresh recognition by his unanimous election to a post he is so well fitted to adorn.

ing should be continued even to the bone. A third contented himself with the general suggestion that my method of treating such subjects was hardly in accordance with the dignified traditions of this body. I took all these criticisms in good part. I realized that the gentlemen who made them could have no possible bias, that they were actuated only by a sense of duty or by a desire to promote what they believed to be the best interests of this Society. I deferred to their better judgment. I drew the sacrificial knife. I said, "I have been willing in moderation to shear, but I cannot vivisect this animal; I prefer to cut its throat." In other words, I withdrew the communication; substituting for it that half-page of innocuous manuscript which you will find printed in the volume of Proceedings this day laid upon the table.¹

And here, so far as this Society is concerned, I drop the subject; merely adding that, while I freely consented to make this little sacrifice, while I was even ready to humble myself as I have done here to-day, yet I could not find it in my heart to abandon one who, as I firmly believe, has rested her defence upon my shoulders. I reflected that the pamphlet, the accuracy of passages in which I called in question, has not merely been distributed among the personal friends of its distinguished author, but that it has unquestionably found a place—a place of permanent record—on the shelves of numerous public libraries in New England and elsewhere; and I thought it only fair, only right, that the future student of provincial domestic history should be enabled to discover in some obscure and dusty corner of the same shelves another little pamphlet, issued solely upon my own responsibility, disengaging wholly the dignity of this Society, and which will embody the substance of my remarks upon this subject, accompanied, not impossibly, by some slight annotation. I shall be happy to send a copy of this little pamphlet to any member of the Society who may feel the smallest interest in the matter, and in the mean time I should be really grateful if any one of them—Mr. Charles Francis Adams, Jr., of course, necessarily excepted—

¹ Proceedings, 1884-1885, p. 379.

would supply me with an appropriate classical quotation for my titlepage. Those I have hitherto thought of do not quite satisfy me, and I have been obliged thus far to content myself with the following sentence, or rather half-sentence, which I take from an inspired source: "And David put his hand in his bag, and drew thence a stone; and *slang* it!"

NOTE. — An obliging person has pointed out to me, what I supposed I had made sufficiently evident, that I have not the blood of the lady of whom I have constituted myself the champion. He seems to think that because I am descended from her step-son, I must necessarily be indifferent to her good name. I can only reply that such has not been my own experience of the state of mind resulting from such family connections.

I regret to add (and I only mention it because I am afraid Dr. E. may, if I do not) that this step-son, after his father's death, became an imprudent person in money-matters. Katharine Winthrop was put to great annoyance by his delay in refunding a considerable sum she had allowed him the use of; and though she eventually got back her principal, I doubt if she ever saw a penny of her interest. I venture to hope that she may regard my activity in her behalf in the light of a tardy reimbursement; and if I am fortunate enough to obtain from her any distinct manifestation on this subject, I shall communicate it to the Society for Psychical Research.

R. C. W. JR.

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